

English Translation of Op-Ed appearing in the Isaan Bizweek, Khon Kaen, Thailand:

Building Community Response for Good

Khon Kaen University's Center for Civil Society and Non-Profit Management Opens its Doors

By Kristie A. Kenney, U.S. Ambassador to Thailand

DECEMBER 25, 2013: One month ago, we were stunned by the natural catastrophe unleashed by Super Typhoon Haiyan on our friends nearby in the Philippines. Within days of the devastating storm on November 8, Thailand joined the international community in an outpouring of goodwill and humanitarian assistance. Thailand contributed to the Philippines a medical team, emergency survival bags, and 5,000 tons of rice. Thailand's civil society organizations (CSOs), coordinated by the Thai Red Cross, and the private sector demonstrated their philanthropic strength by canvassing their networks and collecting more than 70 million Baht in donations to support typhoon victims in their moment of need. It's a timely example of how civil society in Thailand can be a powerful force for good in the region.

Being organized and ready to assist in times like these is essential. For that reason, I am proud to announce that Khon Kaen University has just opened a Center for Civil Society and Non-Profit Management with support from our U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). It will fill a key gap in national and regional development. Until now, individuals interested in pursuing civil society careers in Thailand and Southeast Asia, particularly from the Lower Mekong region, have had limited options to formally acquire the skills necessary to create and sustain strong civil society organizations. At the same time, while philanthropic organizations in Thailand are very strong and offer a model for civil society in the region, there is a shortage of CSOs to fulfill the equally important function of building a culture of participation in social development. Khon Kaen's new center will address these needs.

Thailand and the United States share the view that participatory governance is beneficial to our peoples and contributes to sustainable and equitable development. As President Barack Obama recently said, "the strength and success of all countries and all regions depends in part on protecting and supporting civil society."

Khon Kaen University's new Center of Civil Society and Non-Profit Management is a great example of a strategic partnership between the United States, in connection with our Lower Mekong Initiative, and a leading academic institution in Thailand's northeast. This partnership leverages the university's significant technical capacity to meet the needs of the civil society sector in Thailand and the region. The center will offer a well-designed curriculum, as well as certificate and degree programs, that focus on modern methods and techniques of non-profit management. By offering professional qualifications, the center can attract the brightest students to pursue careers in the sector. This center will be an asset to Thailand and its neighboring nations; it is well-positioned to take on the important work of strengthening civil society for the good of Thai society and the region as a whole. We look forward to the first group of graduates and hearing about their great contributions to relief, development, and progress for Southeast Asia.

